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SPECIAL REPORT

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MANAGING ATTENDANCE SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE A HIGH PRIORITY IN BOSTON

In the last two years the City has placed greater emphasis on its Managing Attendance Program (MAP) in an effort to control absenteeism among public employees. That emphasis is important to improve employee productivity and service delivery, decrease sick leave costs and eliminate abuse. In 1986, approximately $14 million in wages was paid to city and county employees who did not work due to sickness. The costs of temporary employees, overtime and lost municipal services would add to that figure. The Personnel Division of the Administrative Services Department is responsible for administering the MAP, and at this time needs to play a larger role in the coordination of the Program. With the strong support of the Mayor and Director of the Administrative Services Department, Personnel should move forward to ensure that the administration of the Program is uniform and centralized.

Managing Attendance Program

In 1978, the Research Bureau issued a Special Report characterizing Boston's sick leave program as poorly supervised, frequently abused and too expensive. The Report recommended that the City, among other things, develop and implement an integrated computerized Personnel/Payroll system to manage sick leave usage. In 1979, Mayor White issued an Executive Order which established the MAP. This Program was designed to curtail sick leave abuse while not infringing upon an employee's legitimate use of sick time. It established standard procedures for monitoring sick leave, identifying patterns of abuse and taking appropriate disciplinary actions. It also identified personal problems that may cause excessive absenteeism and provided assistance to address these problems. In 1984, Mayor Flynn issued the same Executive Order on Managing Attendance. However, a 1986 Bureau Special Report revealed that the majority of city departments ignored the MAP. Subsequently, Mayor Flynn issued a memo to all department heads reinforcing his 1984 Executive Order requiring that the MAP be actively enforced. Presently, 47 departments out of 62 participate in the MAP. Other departments such as Health and Hospitals, School and Library have established their own attendance programs. In the Police and Fire Departments, only civilian employees participate in the MAP.

The Personnel Division, since 1986, has worked to institutionalize this Program by making it a high priority among departments. Personnel has held training sessions on the MAP for all personnel officers and department heads. In conjunction with the Data Processing Division, Personnel has developed a personal computer program for tracking attendance. However, to date this program has not been implemented. Departments are required to submit attendance data on a quarterly basis. Presently, these reports are compiled manually. To help assess the uniformity of compliance, Personnel recently completed an audit of departmental attendance practices.

According to Personnel, within the 47 participating departments, the average days absent is expected to decrease from 11.9 days in 1986 to 10.0 days in 1987. The Bureau believes that the steps taken by Personnel over the past two years have made city departments more sensitive to the problem of employee absenteeism as department heads become more committed to the MAP and training is provided to personnel officers. The Bureau is unable, however, to verify the decrease in the average number of sick days taken last year. Sick usage reports from the City's main computer system calculated absences at a substantially lower rate than reflected by the MAP. Further, analysis of

the average days absent revealed discrepancies in the compilation of the statistics from year to year as well as between departments. One department, for example, showed a large decrease in the number of absent days because in 1986 employees using workmens compensation were recorded as sick, but in 1987 they were excluded from the sick leave statistics. This department subsequently was excluded from the annual statistics. However, it is unclear how many other departments have different reporting procedures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Personnel Division has been successful in getting most departments to focus on improving attendance among their employees. However, these efforts need to be carried further to improve the Program's effectiveness. The Bureau recommends the following:

1. The Director of Administrative Services should assist the Personnel Division to ensure departmental compliance of the City's MAP and to broker inter-agency disputes regarding its implementation. Currently, central lines of responsibility are unclear and departmental compliance is uneven. With his support, Personnel could be held accountable for the overall administration of the MAP. As administrator, Personnel should address the following four recommendations.

2. Personnel should rely exclusively on its Personnel/Payroll system for monitoring and reporting sick leave usage. This recommendation was originally made by the Bureau in 1978 and again in 1986. Utilizing the Personnel/Payroll system would ensure central control, provide consistent information among departments and reduce tedious paper work. Discrepancies between the manual and automated systems have resulted in departments relying on their own manual system, which contributes to the lack of uniformity and centralization. The Personnel/Payroll system is the appropriate vehicle to report sick usage for the MAP. On each payroll, sick hours for each city employee are recorded and verified by the department head and then posted to the City's personnel master file. Historical attendance data, by individual employee and department, is available to Personnel for central reporting purposes. The City should reconsider implementation of the personal computer program in each department in favor of enhancing its integrated payroll system to accommodate MAP objectives. The long-term solution should be the development of a calendar based MAP as part of the Personnel/Payroll system.

3. Personnel should establish a procedures manual for uniform administration of the MAP. This would help ensure accurate and consistent record keeping among all departments.

4. To maintain central control, Personnel should require all city-funded departments to submit summary sick leave usage data on a periodic basis. Currently, departments such as Health & Hospitals, School, Library, City Council and some Suffolk County departments have established alternative attendance programs. The Personnel Division and Director of Administrative Services should ensure that a uniform managing attendance policy is incorporated into all union contracts.

5. Personnel should compile information to evaluate the MAP. This information should include such items as the cost of sick leave and the cost of administering the Program as well as data on the number of employees who have been reprimanded, suspended or dismissed due to poor attendance. Personnel should also identify employees with poor attendance where no action has been taken.

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